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The Winds

Sulaiman Raja

University of Wyoming, sraja@uwyo.edu

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Presage

To

An

Old Age

As told by Sulaiman Raja

Presage

Earth's sighs, wind come and go.
Skies weep, only to keep leaves dancing along.
Trees sit, to remind the Keeper of the Watch it all must go on.
Hares run, we stand still.

The ground rumbles,
Striking its humbling key.
All feel its weight,
That of fated eternity.

The Darkness above breathes not,
Asking not a thing but perpetuality.
The luminaries beyond crouch in radiant silence.
Manifold strings rippling a ripening.

It is time, says the morning bird.
It has come, say the reptilian ancients.

The creatures,
Sitting well within
Look without towards the hour of their uncertainty.

The rivers wild thirst,
Slaking only after the washing of verdant memories.
Rushing, rushing, down the ravines
Taking, taking all but the untakeable.

The gaping maw
lies closed before its feeding,
biding, as it does, to see its will fulfilled.

Awakenings

Earth's eyes, all be as they be.
Skies crackle, new paths emblaze.
Trees hiss, speaking of the Coming.
Hares hide, we stand still.

The ground shudders,
Passing along its message.
None who listen
Stand with quiet feet.

The oceans beneath stir with expectant churning,
Riling the waters to make the way.

Look right, says the cougar.
Look left, says the hills.
His steps like existence,
There can be no other way.

Onwards, onwards screams what needs be.
Upwards, upwards, the winds carry.
Face it, face it, its way is The Way.

Laughter, assurance, congruence;
Dissipation, inhalation, cessation.

Heads pop out of their holes,
Bodies join in the fields,
Hearts meet hearts,
All is well, all is well.

It was autumn when I first arrived. I had no idea who Hu'in was to be, nor what trials awaited me. The wind had just started to show its teeth, biting my nose, cutting the air. I was young then, eleven years of age, sent by my parents to learn the ways of the Way. Rumours of sages tucked deep away in those parts of the mountains where even Time only whispers pushed my parents to push me out the door, to seek a life worth being silent for.

I remember the cragged trees looking on, goading me, edging me "come this way..." they spoke "come see what lies ahead for you, young Tido. Oh, young Tido how your heart leads you, how your tongue teases you, how your legs will find their way."

I remember the stones obediently putting their faces up, wishing me sure-footed happiness. All I carried was the soft, strong, woven robe my grandmother had lovingly put over my head to wish me good luck, a pair of leather sandals, a water jug, the looking-glass my brother had collected from his days in the war, rough pants, a soft shirt, and the only remaining work of my father, his final words bound in lambskin and etched with ink from a faraway spring where all who took in its dark-green waters beamed quietly from within.

I remember the black birds cawing their observance, announcing that here comes another walking the way. With their eyes, they watch me along. With their feet, surely they felt my hesitant excitement. Shazradiin Valley could not have been far, perhaps another couple days walk or so.

I had walked from the town of my family, Nursrak, on the plains where the winds make the tall grass whip, and the busy scurry with ready ears within the sea of shrubbery.

Many days I travelled where I met not a single human soul. However, not a day went by when I wouldn't crouch low and spy on some innocent rodent, or some flowery bird. How gleefully they hobble on their way, moving, carrying on with their lives to the best of their suitings. I could watch them for hours, relishing all the little things. A bird itching his side with his beak, itching again, itching again, wait what's that over there! Itching again, shaking his head, looking into the distance...is that my friends? Yes, Yes it is. I'm going to meet them. Graceful flappings!

The path took me past several streams where I would fill my jug and listen to the ripples of the water. The wind would sometimes flurry in, raking the river's surface as it came. Sleek critters would slip in by water's edge and go fishing. Their movements in the water assuring me they were at home. Long-legged insects sitting contentedly on the surface, gliding along as if they're only care was their next gliding. It was always at rivers where the course of life beats most apparent.

Past the plains, towards the setting sun, lay the lands of many lakes. I did not like this place.

Past the land of many lakes, begins the fields where rock is all you see. Hot is this place always, no clouds to get in the sun's way. Walking, crawling, scooting, hopping for hours, hours, hours. Resting in the shade beneath the blaze above, seeing all the other seekers of asylum. Spiders have woven their webs; squishy flyers have stopped in their tracks. Big eared small things skip through cracks and zip around the dust. Quiet, the rhythmic breathing of a slumbering eater of ants resounds throughout the underrock. The tranquility found in those restful pockets of shadow sits happily still upon my heart. Back into the heat, the sun beating down on all who meet its rays, I could not but walk on, looking onwards to my

new home. The land of rocks, looking back upon it, is quite the strange place. How could it have come about? A seeming ocean of crumbled boulders and rocks, strewn for miles in all directions, with no hill or even a high place to speak of. No answers have come to this question; only legends of a vain sea goddess cursed eternally to lay jagged and motionless, without say as to whom rests within her shadowed hollows.

Four days through the body of that forlorn goddess and I was finally greeted by the lick of mountain fog, but a mountain was nowhere to be seen. Stumbling, looking about, a rock gave way and I slipped and crashed down a slide of pebbles and gravel, until my head met the ground and my body slunk into the flowing waters. I awoke to the delicate and intricate caresses of the river-gorged lichen upon my face. My whereabouts I cared less for. The river was chilling, and I had to get warm. Loose sticks abounded, and dry tufts of grass could be found tucked away within the stones. I got a fire started quickly and took off my clothes to dry. Fortunately, the fall and the water had damaged neither my looking glass nor my father's book.

Looking about, it seems I had fallen into an underground chasm, the light filtering in above...Voices? Voices! Those are voices I hear. Steps? Steps! Hello! Hello! I'm down here. Help! I'm down here!

"Well, hello," said the smiling head popping in through a dusty crack, "What are you doing down there? Aren't you cold and wet? Seems like a weird place to camp out, eh?"

"I'm not sure where I am."

"Well, my good son, you're in Shazradiin Valley! Hahahaha, come on out. Here, we'll send you some rope."

That was my first encounter with those smiling faces of Shazradiin Valley, though they do not always smile.

The chill fall air greeted me as I emerged from that jailing chasm. Smiling faces with coarse clothes and no shoes stood around me, contentedly breathing in the stranger they had just rescued.

“You seek the halls of Shazradiin Home do you not?”

“Yes, I seek the place where the world is sought.”

“Well, then, let us be on our way, for you are not the only one who wishes to walk those halls.”

I followed these ascetics (who would turn out to be the very masters I had ventured from my home to find) and could not help but marvel at their steps. Each movement seemed a dance with the air. Each breath seemed a renewing of the environ. Animals would stare silently as we passed, almost bowing their exultations. The river would flow to the pace of their tread, and the sun’s light seemed to beam through them as though they were its resting place.

Coming out of what I later adopted to call the Eye of the Mountain, I beheld for the first time what no other sight has bested, Shazradiin Valley. To the left, towered the Mountain capped in snow, the winds raging about its monumentousity, its deep, jagged fingers reaching down, growing greener and livelier as they came nearer to a glimmering pool, whose size would not warrant it to be called a pool, more like a large lake. Across from this pool, Shazradiin Home stood solemnly accepting: its hewn stone, sculpted by ancient masters, shrouded by swirling mist.

“Well, we’re here. You best come with us.”

I did not reply, for how could I when I believed myself to have entered paradise. My new life had just begun.

Fields

“Breath. Breeaathh.” Said the master as the lone shaft of incense burnt in the center of the room, flicking its smoky tongue into the air, greeting our eyes with formful delight and our noses with sweet frankincense .

“Breath,” said the master “and be as *your* being the smoke. How would you rise? What would you touch? Why swirl? Why twirl? Why come up then rain ghostly back down?”

Be as the smoke, huh?

Alright...breath....breath....breeeaaattthhh. Rising, rising, rising, tuff. A bubble of air, my form is awry, my smoky tendrils dissolving below me, wisping me about. Rising, rising, rising, why do I break?

Dinggggg!

That ancient bell resounding throughout the stone walls, twinning around the edges of hearing, shaking the greened brass fitting in that dark corner of the hall.

“Remember,” spoke the master,

“We live as we are.” Said the young pupils in mumbled unison, rising up from their contended seatings, shuffling towards the sun to begin their body training.

“What are you thinking, young one?”

“You say we are to be as our being the smoke. But, well, what is it to be as our being the Being? Or to be ourselves for that matter?”

Deep breath he breathed the master. Smiling, beaming, he whispered, “You are.”

You are.

“Now off you go.”

As I was leaving I noticed the master staying behind sweeping the floor, shifting the ashes, talking with someone in the shadows, humming a hum that filled the room and shook the bell from within.

The light was bright outside, shining straight down, making the coarse training jerkins like armors of light bedecking the wiry, fiery young disciples.

“Hey! Tido! Come’re!” said my friend Jin’li the beckoner.

“Lame lesson, huh? Master Gundak loves his brooms...and his smoke.” Jin’li whispering the last bit. He knew the smiling masters’ powers.

Twack!

“AY!”

“Jin’li, be quiet and do the exercises.” Master Filn was good at slapping people from a distance. One time, I remember it like it was today, Master Filn caught Jin’li picking flowers and eating them in the Garden of the Bees. Across the whole field you hear ‘Jin’li!’ Twack! ‘AY@!’ Hehehehe, too funny. How did he do that, though? I can today, if the room is to my understanding, snuff out a candle or flip a page, but never slap someone across a whole field, in the middle of the day with that much force. The exercises we did were training to feel the air around you, the force within you, and the flow within and without.

After the exercises, Jin’li and I gathered some bread and soft cheese, wrapped them, and headed out for a walk into the fields.

“Tido, what do you think Master Gundak meant by ‘be as your being the smoke?’” Jin’li asked as we took the path out past the goat pen.

“Here, have some bread,” I didn’t want to answer the question. It was too fresh in my mind.

“How do you think he does it?” By now we were sitting in the tall grass listening to the wind shake hands with the tuffy tops.

“See that beetle?”

“Where? climbing up that stalk?”

“Yeah,” twoush

“You made him shake. Hahahaha. Watch this.” Twackle! Up he went, spinning, grasping, until he easily buzzed out his wings and took to the winds to find a less bothersome tuff of grass. Jin’li, though he seemed to be as airy as my smacks, was perhaps the most diligent pupil of Master Filn’s. I’ve seen Jin’li blow flour clear off one finger from all the way across the room without disturbing a speck off the other four fingers.

Pricking our ears up, we both looked at each other, then popped our heads above the grass.

“Whose that?”

“Not sure.”

“What’s he doing?”

“Not sure.”

Now, I knew that person to be Hu’in, but then it was a just mysterious figure in the fields with us. We watched him stand still for a long time. Then, he began smoothly, slowly, moving his arms, around and around, whoosh, whoosh, WHOOSH. The tuffs around him began swirling violently. Faster and faster, the whole field began to swirl and shake. WHOOSH, WHOOSH, WHOOSH, now the trees are being pulled. The clouds above began to darken and encircle our heads. All the bugs and beetles of the field were taken up into the created maelstrom. Strangely, they seemed to be moving freely about, oblivious, impervious to the whirling forces

around them. In unison, their chirps and chittles began to mix with the winds swaying, flowing to some inaudible tune. The hair on my arms began to raise, and I felt a thrumming, a humming, an enlivening within my chest. What is this force, this feeling? I could dance. I could sing! I could shake the earth and crack mountain tops!

“Enough.” We heard the stranger say.
And all was quiet.

“Where did he go?”
Where *did* he go? He was nowhere in sight, nor was he anywhere to be heard. “Jin’li?”

“Hrm?”

“Did you feel that too?”

“The song? Rising up within us and all that was around us, reaching a climax of surging energy, and dissipating just like that?”

“We are young...”

“Yes. Let us head back now?”

Jin’li and I were about the same age. His village was in the foothills, quiet and still. His parents had enough means to support Jin’li and his six siblings. They had the happiest goats, always jumping and baahing, teasing each other and spitting across fields. I’m sure some smiling masters long ago had found the goats to be a happy home.

On our way back I couldn’t help running through what I had saw. Unison, one energy, one field, one center, one figure; all swaying, all rising, all *energized/gizing*. My younger self could not grasp what he had just seen, but I know now, and it still sends heat to my chest and chills down my arms. The mysterious stranger

(Hu’in) had understood his being. One with what he was, one with the All, Hu’in was only feeling, coming to know how far he could reach within himself, how far within the world he could extend his grasping, probing, thirsting self.

“Tido?”

“Yeah?”

“You still haven’t answered my question.” By now we were coming back to Shazradiin home, back to our rolls, back to meditation.

“You see this grass, Jin’li?”

“Yeah.”

“What does it do? It grows. It drinks. It stands. It sways. It spreads itself to the winds. It dies. What else can it do? That is its being. To be a swayer and a grower. A liver and a dier. Is there much difference between that field mouse and the grass it seeks for shelter? The field mouse grows, it drinks, it walks, it hears, it hops, it sees, it feels, it spreads itself throughout the field. It is eaten. It wastes away. Is there much difference between us and that field mouse? We grow, we drink, we walk, we talk, we eat, we hear, see, feel, we think, we create, we smack Jin’lis from across fields, we shift, we build, we music, we spread our line, we die, we waste away. Jin’li, what is the difference between us and the grass?”

“It doesn’t get hurt as much when Master Filn slaps it! Hehe.”

“Hehe. Hehe. Hahahahaha!”

Hallowed

We slept in the stone, us disciples of Shazradiin. Cut out enough so that we might find a home to lay our bodies to rest. Each night a peace pervades that joins all. Each disciple enjoying a deep slumber, lulled to the beat of resting hearts and quiet minds; souls melted and flowing as one, heaving and sighing, ebbing and flowing, dancing that loveliest of dances. Beautiful.

When morning arose and light began to trickle itself in, with the new sun came a new rhythm, a rhythm of wonder, a rhythm of vivacity, the rhythm of life. Drenched in the walls, in the ground, within the air, it whispered you to yourself. It brought you home, back within your own temple. A shining forth was to occur, a movement of yourself into the silent beauties, the flowing streams, the dark, cool caves, into the glimmering pools.

That was waking up at Shazradiin. What would happen next is normally (for me); a walking down to the pool and washing my feet, hands, face, letting the soft blue, dark sky and the golden meadows welcome me to the day. But one day I decided to take a walk along the goat paths towards those fingers of the Mountain where thoughts can wander far into the day, skipping not a beat to welcome a friend or greet a master.

The frost had frozen the pools on the path; the goats' troddings visible in the chunked out ice. A coolness, wet and grasping, tugged at my left side, the hill greeting me in its silent way. To the right, the sun was raying across the fields, transforming that autumn brown into the most sublimating of scenes. Along this goat path I walked, never losing sight of the growing arm of the sun, the cooling earth to my left warming as mid-morning turned to early afternoon.

Perched on jutting outcrop, I sat amongst the rocks and all was still, all was alive. I watched as a mother bear ruffed at her cublings, them galloping to catch up; how their fur ruffled as the wind tuffed it's way about them. Their paws, larger than my thirteen-year-old hands, padding down the soft grass, making it hard for the worms of the earth to continue their migration at full speed. A blackbird cawed its rough, melodious hurrah at it having found that newly created dam of earthen crawlers. The trees swayed and swished, seeming almost to wave in congratulatory bowings at bellies soon to be filled and black ones soon to be cawing their soft, contented thank-yous.

The sun had become the brightest of the day, so, I made my way from off the rocks and into an arch of earth where roots dangled white, thick and beard-like. The cool damp earth greeting me, meeting me as I stepped atop the shifting pebbles alongside the trickling river. In this place, the armored hundred-legged wonders clucked their quickly way through the pebbly maze laid before them. A giant to them, what else could make such rumbles? My feet, power; each step an earthquake. Shelter, shelter, they seek weaving now between the dangling beard and finding their safety in their trusty hollows.

Stepping out into the light, the river bright and gleaming, the grass alongside jumped and scuffled. Out pops a few water birds, little babelings in toe, quack quacking their jubilation and giddiness. How lucky, I thought, to paddle amongst the cold, cool waters, following one's mother, bumping into one's brother, diving quickly for a quick snack, and carrying on along the river that is your life, if only until you again waddle yourself amongst the reeds and grasses. To the grasses I went, watching as they danced the dance

of the winds, going this way and that, each stroke layered on top of the other, with time as the canvas. I watched as the grass sat readily by having readied itself for the coming of the cold, its roots thick, its stock ample to supply a cold's worth of continuance.

Stooping to drink at the water's edge, that bounding animal whom the hunters of my village used to revere as their families' savior during the harsh, cold winter months. It's meat rich, its heart sustaining, its size enough to keep a family happy throughout the season, that horned animal was a gleaming in my eyes. I loved it, more than I loved any other animal. Not because I enjoyed its taste, but because it meant the same thing to me as those earth crawlers did to those cawers in the sky; a happy winter, safe with those close to the heart. 'Thank you.' I say each time those majestic beasts raise their heads to acknowledge me. 'Thank you.' We say as we take their life into our own.

Does the stalker of the mountains say the same? Surely it does. I watched the struggle steam out of that beloved animal's body as the mountain cougar mortally kissed its neck. How it must be so. The stalker must survive just the same.

It is time to walk back.

The sun had now crossed the sky and was beginning to meet its daily tomb. The goat path had warmed, erasing the morning's trappings in pools of gleaming light. How it is with life I thought. Each moment a priceless painting, passing from beauty to beauty; each life hallowed by its doomed perpetuance.

The Trek (Winter)

I had never seen the masters so. Seemed their minds all listening to a distant hum. Their bodies losing that grace, wandering almost aimlessly, each seeming not to sit smiling within their own temples. But to where? To where were they turned? To where had they gone, leaving us only to watch their figures pace cane in hand. Like bees droning around their queen, the masters of Shazradiin carried on. A silence was felt in Shazradiin, a quiet in the stone. Life seemed to thrum emptily, a void in all our minds. What was missing? We knew. The masters were not with us anymore. But, where were they? This carried on for a dying and a birthing of a moon.

I was dreaming of my family; my little brother had crafted his first wooden horse, large enough to hold in his hand and prance along the earth. We smiled and laughed, playing also in the game of imaginings. The fire began to brighten. The heat began to warm me, but how? 'Tido' it spoke cuttingly. 'Tido.'

"Tido. Arise. It is time."

I woke up to the masters grouped about me, all smiling, all prepared.

"Tido, to the Mountain we shall go. Something must be done. We shall trek and you shall come with us."

I went for my stalker-skin coat...

"No. It will only slow us down. You will not need it anyways." They were right. Even as sleep was still about me, I could not help but know the change in them.

"We set off now."

Reaching the mouth of the Mountain would take to the moon becoming its full self. So we began. I had not seen the

masters move with such power, with such impetus, and neither had I felt my legs so much filled with vigour and unending energy. Each step that of two, each moment shattered into a nothingness I still to this day find entrancing. On the second day the snow began to fall. Still we pressed on with nothing but our coarse robes and bare feet. The snow began to pile around us, but still our path was clear, still our coverings remained dry, still a warmth surrounded me. How could this be? A thought that only passed quietly and swiftly through my mind; for I knew then that the masters were present, more present than they had ever been, and more so than they would ever be. They had always been meditative, alert, smiling, but now a pointed resoluteness, a determination that nothing could stand to impede its way. Where the path was rocky, it became smooth and easy to traverse. Where rivers had flown, the beds now came together. Through day and through night we carried on. Even for the masters, such a pace, such a bowing of the land to their will, such a radiance of being was nothing short of breathtaking magnanimousness. In their train, I walked with the masters, matching step with step, breath with breath, will with will. Each step, a weight immeasurable except on the scales of fate. Each breath, a size unthinkable except in comparison to the life of the stars. What were we? An arrow piercing the heart of what was to be.

“We stop now. Ti’rin, build us a fire. Now, we rest.” Why we needed a fire, I did not know.

Its flames reminded me of Shazradiin Home, the flickering shadows cast upon the snowy hills reminiscent of pensive disciples readying themselves for slumber. Master Gundak retrieved something from within his robe and set it upon the fire. Its dried leaves catching flame, sending blue smoke arising against the moon.

Oh, Mother Moon, how lustrous and luminous you were that night of nights. She seemed to welcome our offering, as a sister warmly tussles her young brother’s hair.

“Tido.” Spoke Master Gundak. I looked at him sitting across the fire. “You must go now. Go to the mouth of the Mountain. Enter in to that cave of caves.”

“What shall I find there?”

“Only time shall whisper that to you. Go now, and Master Xu’nhi will be by your side.”

The fire from the camp soon fell beyond the ridge, and into the night we flew. The mountain seemed a soft steel, the master and I cutting a sharp groove through her. Battling a weariness beyond all weariness, I lost my steps amongst those mountain hills, but the master guided me along. The mouth of the cave appeared and the master ushered me to enter. Why did he not join me? His answer was silence. Goodbye, Tido. I heard him speak into the winds.

The cave was cold, too cold. Yet, it had a warmth that made one forget one’s past. A flickering ember of a shadow held firm where I was to go within this labyrinth of fathomless darkness, all the while my strength flowed out of me, withering, withering, quieting. Alas, I came to an opening. Vast darkness enveloped me. A voice rumbled from the within.

“Welcome.”

Aurelion

Welcome, young one.

It is time you have come

. It is time your eyes shall be opened,

your ears to be awakened,

your mind to be centered.

We have been watching,

We have been waiting.

Time is nothing.

Your masters know this, but still they understand.

They must stand among you,

Smiling,

Laughing,

They must stand with you, around you, within you.

You feel them, do you not?

You hear them, do you not?

You laugh with them, do you not?

Each breath you measure.
Each stride you recall.
Of course,
Of course,
Of course.
These things you did hear.
These things you did see.
These things you did think.
But what did you feel?
But what did you know without knowledge of?
Your masters,
They teach of your being.
They show of your being.
How you can move the air.
How they can still the glances of birds and men.
How you can all dance amongst the glades,
And have life spring forth.

Oh, young one,
What are you then?
Where is your home?
Where your family?
Where are you?
You feel the ground beneath your feet.
You taste the water's quenching dew.
You witness the sun about his wheel.
Music soothes your ears.
But there is more, isn't there?
Some thing more that you *feel*.
A feeling beyond your eyes' scope to see.
A feeling so acute your acute ears list off.
A feeling that pervades all feeling but leaves no trace, except its
tracelessness.
You know this.
The masters have danced to its beat since their smiling.
The birds have soared to its winds since the time of birds and winds.
The grass has spread its words,

All the while the horned beast has passed it along.

The cougar has been its champion,

And the bear its mother.

Shazradiin has been the son to the father that is All.

Loose you anchors and sail the sea.

You

Are

What

You

Are

Meant

To

Be.

Darkness.

It is time for the Coming.

Witness!

Rapture

Light.

No forms.

No hands.

No feeling.

No thought.

Being.

Becoming.

Being.

Being.

Being.

All that there is,

that is all.

One glimpse,

one slip,

one fracture,

one eternity within the bounded.

Darkness.
Forms.
Hands.
Feeling.
Thought
Non-being
Unbecoming.
Un
Be
Coming.
All that there is,
that is all.
One glimpse,
one slip,
one fracture,

one eternity within the boundless.

A choice,
a will,
the All arises from the Nothing,
and,
the Nothing's maw welcomes the All.
Light and Darkness dance the dance,
and dance,
and dance,
and dance.
One, two three,
the Heavens, stars, and bees,
trees, winds, and snakes,
mountains, snow, and lakes,
horses,
carriages,
and smiles.

Stones,
Beds,
And heads.
Heads that see.
Heads that taste.
Heads that waste the least of space.
Sense.
Mind.
Essence.
Three, two, one,
Nothing.
A dance.
A Way.
The Way
for all
to be
and
become.

Sol

Oh, great Aurelion Sol, why did you not tell me that this was all?

A most trifling of trifles, this dance of dances.

From the father to the son, from the mother to the father,

Times grins his vain, shacklous grin.

Run and play,

sleep and prey,

night and day,

it all goes on as it must,

this ended endless charade.

One, two, three,

On to the infinity:

Ending, ended,

Beginning, begun,

Smiles,

Smiles,

and only smiles.

What else can there be but smiles?

The Way (Spring)

Oh, great Tido Pakhti, embrace what you are.

Your beginning has ended,

And your ending has begun.

From out the Light and Darkness,

Your formlessness has been spun.

Your reach will be endless,

Mourn not your taste,

For it is now your jokester.

Mourn not your sight,

For it is now muse.

Mourn not your hearing,

For it is now your winds of sailing, taking you to all things.

My end is ending,

And with its end,

Your journey must be begun.

Goodbye, dear Tido

And welcome in the sun.

A ray's warmed glow sat patiently on my visage, dissipating the ignorancing clouds of death's slumber. What paining, what coarseness, accompanied me at my awakening. Three cycles of pain subsiding then returning, a coarseness being these cycles' constant companion. Only after the flowing of the fourth cycle was I able to see form; an encasing of darkness outlining a blinding, enticing enchantment. The coarseness began to undulate, sometimes ebbing, sometimes flowing, forcing me to bury my head within the sand. As the 7th cycle was subsiding, I began to comprehend the darkness; I was *within*, that much I knew, and the coarseness came from *without*. Putting myself on the boundary of my within and the without, my curiosity was met with pain and an irresistible pull to retreat to my sand hole, but I remained for a few moments. The coarseness had reached a new pitch, but the undulations were various, some sharp, some prolonged, many repeated. The pain was too much and I had to rest. By and by, a world appeared that I could maneuver within and distinguish between its unlimited components. It would have pleased me to have been able to ease myself into the world without, but it did not happen so.

Overpowered by a drive that filled my whole being, I rushed out of the darkness in search of a means to domesticate this dæmon that had possessed me, when, like a snake-killer, a sensation bit my side and brought all into focus.

"Hello, Tido!"

"Hello, Master Filn! How...what... is the winter over?"

"The blossoms are pinker than ever. I am sure the other masters will be glad of your coming. Come, drink some of this and

let's fly! The air doesn't always have to be directed towards your friend JIn'li! Sit and put it below you! He he He!"

And up we went. How easy.

"How high can we go?"

"As high as the clouds! But it is easy to lose one's thoughts in them"

Passing by, the sky seemed a small place. All around me I could see. Encompassing, surpassing, enveloping, what a small world it became to me.

"But, my young master Tido, dissolve the clouds, dissolve the sky! and look about you now!"

Oh what wonder! Depthless vastness above, deepest smallness below, the center of the looking glass, Master Filn and I!

"It is time, young master Tido, to talk with the others."

"Where are we?" He urges me to look below. The glimmering pool a gateway into bliss laying just below, through the clouds, down, down down.

"Let fall." What a speck he became.

Let fall, and fall I did. How peaceful it was in those moments of solitude; a point, solid and unique, carrying itself in freedom, all the while a center of uttermost enjoyment and silence. Descending, I let the world rush at me, thinking, wishing for a moment it would give way before me so that my bliss could last for eternity. Moments before the pool's surface I gathered the winds before me and broke into the water. To the surface I was brought, not by my own doing, but by a hidden hand.

Enough.

Did I hear that whisper? Who? Where?

"Welcome back, young master Tido!" All were smiling.

...

"It is time for the Coming. Witness! Those were his last words to me."

"And so it is."

"Should we tell the disciples?"

"They will discover soon enough."

"All will discover soon enough."

"There is not much to do. When it comes it will come."

Aurelion Sol had said no more and I did not wish to ask the masters any more about this 'Coming'. I was weary and found the green, warmed, soft, grass to be a good bed.

Loomings

How beautiful Shazradiin is at Summer time! There is a constant hum about the air, bees humming about their duties. The many critters pitter and patter amongst the undershrubs and can be seen dashing and darting between the grass.

My favorites are the shelled spiders. Their silk is strong, stronger than any fabric woven by man. Their web is a masterpiece. But, they do not use it to capture prey and enjoy their juices. Instead, they weave it so tightly in the middle that they are able to, after some time, bounce themselves into the air, about two hand-lengths. The colors on their bodies resemble those of the orange moth, and attract the huntress of the orange moth, a swift blue bird with long green tail feathers. The blue bird then swoops down and gobbles up the shelled spider. In the blue bird's stomach, the spider is able to survive, encrusted, entrusted within a shell of unimpeachable sturdiness. The spider at this time has carried her egg sac with her. Sensing a disturbance within her (really a giant ball in her stomach), the blue bird expulses what is within her, sending the mother spider spiraling through the air. By this time, the spiderlings have reached maturity thanks to their mother's eternally recurring sacrifice (her body is good nourishment for the maturing spiderlings). Still they stay within the mother shell. Moments before the ground comes crashing in on them, the spiderlings shoot their silk outwards, grasping branches, leaves, stalks, flowers, maybe even the unlucky bee or critter, slowing their fall. At the bottom of their fall the shell opens and the spiderlings are sprayed out. Searching, seeking, finding shelter in all directions, the shelled spiderlings have now a new home, full of all the unknowns a spider could ever know.

In all my time at Shazradiin I had never seen so many of my favorite little beasties. In the tens of thousands their webs were woven in that part of the meadows where the blue birds do not fly. This enclave of spiders was not the strangest to have erupted in Shazradiin that summer. In the thousands came the large horned animals from the plains to the east, far, far to the east where the vastest expanse of water can be heard crashing against the jagged, red rocks. Birds of all feathers clung amongst the trees, filling the air with the most somber of outcries. Slitherers, squirmers, rollers, paddlers, jumpers, hoppers, gliders, ones with six legs, ones with one, and many with hundreds made Shazradiin Valley home. But why? Why? We were all asking, the masters keeping silent, sending peace amongst the anxious new arrivals. I remember Jin'li remarking that the masters now had ten thousand more disciples. 'let them all go to the Mountain' he said, 'then they can all learn to fly like Tido and go home to their own lands again. Twack! Ay! 'Jin'li, the world does not need ten thousand flying horned beasts!' Could be heard all the way from across the pool and meadows.

Shazradiin has had many sounds, many feelings, but that summer was one of the lowest, coldest, saddest I had ever, and have ever felt.

If the masters were busy about their soothings, Hu'in was incessant. He did not sleep. He did not drink. He sat amongst the spiders, the snakes, the critters, the large stalkers, the giant armored horses, the horned trotters, the six-legged scavengers, the thousand-legged scrubbers, the leaf-insects, the earth crawlers; he sat amongst all. He wouldn't move for days. But, where he sat, in a circle that would take half a day's walking to cross, the animals hummed, thrummed, buzzed, chirped, sang, danced a fuller, more

vibrant, richly fecund, pervasive way of being. He did this until nearly the whole valley was filled with a most rapturous of gravities.

It was decided that the animals should be brought to slumber. All manners of creatures, silent, still, joined together in the Dream, where mortal coils have no sway. The disciples would look over the valley, ensuring peace and proper care for the working, but also slumbering masters, and Hu'in. It was before the setting of the sun that the ritual was commenced. The five masters surrounded Hu'in, one pointing to each of the five corners of Shazradiin. A quiet unlike any quiet I have ever felt fell over the valley that day. It was a stillness of the spirit, a calm within, a totality filling the land, bringing all into the folds of the Dream. One breath. One body. All were one: shelled spiders and the blue birds that ate them, mountain stalker and their prey the jumping goats, river fish and flying fischers, striped jungle climbers and slithering man-eaters, the fast and the slow, colorful and the dull, enormous and the toe-sized, smelly and the venomous; even the ground seemed to slumber.

It had been three years since Jin'li and I saw the mysterious figure Hu'in in the grass field. During those silent days, the disciples liked to stay entertained by telling stories of Hu'in's mysterious past.

"I heard he was an orphan of the war, and taken to be a slave of the Mork'hun King, but the King liked him so much he made him his own son. Then, he put Hu'in through military training and made him fight his own brother. When Hu'in saw his brother, they both decided then and there to kill the King, and they did! He stole the King's magic powers and followed them to Shazradiin, the masters finding him near death at the Eye of the mountain."

“I heard he killed his own parents, and joined a league of assassins who would only kill other assassins, and he left only after he killed all assassins, even his own league. Then, he vowed against violence and came here.”

“Well, I heard he met a blade of grass who was the wisest of all that has even been. Then one day, a gardener came and his master was no more. But, before he met his clipped demise the master spoke these words to Hu’in ‘Rejoice. I shall Come again. Silence the storm.’”

“Well, I heard Hu’in was a spirit god.”

“Jin’li, don’t joke.”

Reapings

The creatures did not leave all at once. Those with wings or could fly by other ways carried what fellow-Dreamers they could with them. The sky was dark those few days. How many thousands had came to Shazradiin? It was a great amusement to see a hundred hooked-billed green birds try to carry their armored horse companion away with them. I think those were among the ancestors of the straight-billed blue birds we have today flitting about Shazradiin’s valley skies. The ground sizzled as the slitherers, and the squirmers, and the thousand-legged ground crawlers took their leave. A following sea of glinting armor and shining scale flowed out of Shazradiin Valley those few days. The larger beasts next took to their exodus towards a new home, to a west yet unknown to them. Hu’in awoke sometime before the other masters, while Jin’li, who was supposed to be watchman over the masters was closing his eyes for “just a few moments.” This was the last to be seen of Hu’in, that being of immense gravity and deeply-searching soul.

It was sometime between Hu’in’s disappearance and the awakening of the masters that it first touched our hearts; a cold, deathly cold, a cold that stills the mind of all thought and seeps the soul of all hope, an invisible mist that winds its tendrils into the very core of essence and quiets from within. We did not know what it was so we hid in fear within the once warmed halls of Shazradiin. The stone walls brought warmth to our hearts, but we feared to leave that oasis of hearts. In it, we shut our eyes and left our spirits to the Dream. When we awoke the fire had already been lit, and, sitting, smiling around it were the masters.

“So, who has some stories for us?”

How delighted we were to see them with open eyes again. The dreadfangs of the Coming had sunk deep in ourselves, too deep to remove completely.

“Masters, did you too sense it?”

Eyes glinting less, but with no apprehension in their voices “Yes, We too sensed that most dreadful of dreads. Never in our life has such a thing been felt, nor do we believe will there ever be so again....young master Tido, what did that master of all dragons speak of?”

“He spoke of the Coming and how it is time; that darkness shall reign supreme.”

“I’m afraid the Diviner of the Fabrics never lies about such things. So it is, and so it must be.”

I remember waiting , listlessly applying my attention to nothing at all, walking the doomed halls of Shazradiin Home in a delirious trance shifting between Dream, reality, Reality, and the nether region where Darkness rules. For how was I to know what the Coming would bring. I felt only cold, a cold creeping on all sides, a cold twisting, winding, edging, its way into the place that does not exist, the place where I sit, watching, waiting, being. The other disciples became as the stone, speaking not a word, moving not a finger, seeming to neither listen nor see, only vacantly staring back from a stillness so complete nothingness could almost be said to harbor within them.

The masters knew it was too late to ascend the mountain to look to the horizon for its sign. Too late because they would no

longer gain back their energy loss during my journey to the peak. Too late because if they were to leave, the Coming would have taken Shazradiin Valley into its folds, so it wouldn’t have mattered anyways. Better to stay around the disciples and keep calm than to abandon the sickly terrified.

The coming of autumn had come and it seemed a premonition for what was sinking into our souls. The snow began to fall, thick and heavy but settling nowhere: only seeping, seeping, seeping into the is of what is. Not even the masters could keep their smiles. Not even the masters could contend with such contrasting power. No lightness could stop this darkness. No hope for Shazradiin. Alone, we huddled together and told stories of Master Filn and Jin’li. Always: ‘JIN’LI!’ Twack! ‘Ay!’

We spent three days in silence; all reaching within themselves to try as best they could to keep the frost from freezing their souls. It was on the morning of the fourth day that we saw its impossible claws reaching through the mountains rimming Shazradiin. Clouds so thick stone seemed a cloud of ground grass. Swirls so large the world could have been formed in any one of them. How could it be so? It was only after many, many years spent in contemplation and coming to a greater understanding, that I finally apprehended that cloud, the Coming, for what it was, and still it sent frost down my veins. But, at the time it was only terror incarnate, the doomed seraph of annihilation, an instrument of stilling complete, a bringer of quiet unconscionable, Death.

The horror those few days after viewing it brought. I would not leave my resting place, curled, gnarled, reeking of desperate despair. Even the masters hid to themselves, perhaps to keep the

flame lit within themselves, perhaps to find those lost within the Coming.

Salvation? Salvation did not exist. Salvation meant cessation, a freezing solid: life's flame extracted and extinguished. We were worthy of no pity, for pity belongs in the realm of the living fire, and of that realm we sat not. Whether or not that cloud swept into our Home was of no matter; we had doomed ourselves through the annihilation of all hope, of all sources of smiling, of all traces of Jin'li, or Tido, or Filn, or Xu'nhí. All that was left was cold acceptance. Oh, how lost we the Way! But the Way was nothing as terror froze all. Oh, how lost we the Way!

The Mountain

Hahahahahaha. So, you've come at last, you devourer of worlds, you destroyer of life. So, you've come at last, your reaching hands unraveling what has been. So, you've come at last, to face me, to destroy me, to devour me, to greet me with your wanton, shadowy, dark, caresses. You are the clouds. You are the earth. You are the rivers. You are the birds. You are the moths. You are the scurriers. You are All.

Hahahahahaha. Is this where I've been taken? This mountain top to look upon the trees, mists, caves? Is this how it happens? Is this how the earth sighs, the skies weep, and the ground rumbles? I see my hand, dipped in the All, splashing around, hearing the sweet rippling dews mingle.

I see you, Oh, gentle one! You come as you have come. I see you, Oh, quiet one! Birds do not stir as you engulf. Your sleepy walk has taken many along. Your breaths have entered all, stilling them, listing them to a slumber of slumbers! Oh, great one! How mountains are as ant hills, grand rivers like spilling cups, vast plains a moment's elapsation.

Your whispers sneak silently underneath, grasping, listening, moving, ceasing. I can see them now, your whispers. How they tendril, how they curl, how they wisp, whisk, and whirl. How my eyes eat them, your whispers. You are not the only one who whispers. You are not the only who crawls. You are not the only who touches the All. Oh, you creature. I know you.

Hahahahahaha! What a dance! Dance with me, you creator of worlds, dance with me! Your winds are as fierce as mothers, your dance is as still as this day. Groaning, you come. Tiring, you come. Thirsting, you come. You too know the Way. That is what you are. You move as you move. You speak as you speak. You...are. Come, come to me, come to this valley. Come to these trees, these meadows. Come.

What have you been doing? These hands outstretched before me. They are my own. I move them. I own them. They move as I wish. They clap when I wish. The grass flits roughly between my fingers. The winds bite my cheek. This body has had long enough. It is time. It is time.

I know you, Oh, quiet one! You walk the halls of Shazradiin. You touch without touching, speak without speaking, move without moving. A traveler, you found your way to this quiet place, took refuge in its folds, drank from its stream, breathed from its tombs, slaked your thirst with the soulful mists that is Shazradiin. I know you, Oh, sleepy one.

Your words soak into the rock. Your thoughts saturate the air. Your being interpenetrates. Why do they not see you? You will it. Why do they not hear you? How can they, what ears have they for your words? So, you walk amongst the light, hidden in shadows. So, you are darkness, champion of light. What path walk you? What meandering way has led you here, to face me?

A long way you have come. What desolation? What bleakness? What cold did you leave behind. You have not left those places, have you? The bird cannot sing, the ground cannot thrum, the air cannot move. It is not greed. It is not desire. It is not a never-slaked bloodlust. You have come here because that is what you are. No thought. No sorrow. No longing. No love. No hatred. No violence. No anger. That is what you are, Oh, thoughtless one.

My heart beats true, my warming blood pulsing through my body, invigorating, satiating. My mind does well, my thoughts to this world, the world of quiet, smiling faces, buzzing beetles, tufted grass, rock walls, silent halls. This air cools me. This sun warms me. The fields lull me. The grass soothes me. The All awes me. What are you to me, you formless one?

What have you!?! You do not belong here! You are not of here! Why come you? This place is not your place! This place is not your place! YOU SHOULD NEVER HAVE COME! This is my realm. There is peace! There is quiet! YOU SHOULD NEVER HAVE COME! Why land you here? To devour? To still? I cannot even pity you. What were you? How come you to be as you are? A bird you once were? A lark? A man? Carpenter? Father? Quester? But, you are nothing now. You have become the becomed, following only the Way. You bow to no man, laugh at no merriment, cry at no misery, sit contended at no end of day. I pity you. My pity warms me, chides me, rises me up to know that you and I are the same. Had you eyes you would see. Had you feet you would run. Had you a heart you would love. Had you ears you would sing. But, You. Are. Nothing!

So, you've come at last. It is time. Where shall we go, you and I, my nemesis, my antichrist, my self? I've had enough, come, let us end this.

All
was
quiet.
Nothing.
All
was
still.
Silence.

Beginnings

It was over as peacefully as it had come horrifyingly. The earth no longer groaned, the hills no longer thrummed, the air no longer kicked about, the sky no longer promised to erase all. No trace was ever found of Hu'in, neither was there a need to go on searching. The valley would do as it had done for as long as stones have spoken, all its creatures doing as they will do. The masters set about their task of listening, scattered about amongst the treasure that is Shazradiin Home.

A quiet unlike any other quiet settled within the valley as the first snow of winter began to flit itself down upon the land. The very winds themselves seemed to rest. There were no bird songs, no critter patter, no sound of any kind. All was still. All were resting.

The masters and the students joined in lighting the pyre within the Grand Room. Shadows flickered across solemn faces, while the flame's heat made its way within each man's chest. What were we doing here, us escapees of oblivion? Shazradiin had always taught there was a path for each of us to walk, a way for each of us to be, a fate for each of us to fulfill, that we were no less a part of the happenings of things as the lowly field mouse or the immense glaciers to the north. Shazradiin had always made clear the Way of things, and, as I sat there in that warmed room, I saw in all the faces, in all the flickering shadows, in all the stone, in the air, in the light, in the dark, in my thoughts, in my heart that what is now is what was forever to be. Each step taken, each breath breathed, each day spent in training, learning, being, all had to be, for if it had been otherwise the world would have been a dark and cold place.

I spent the next days wandering the valley. First, I walked across the meadow and sat amongst the boulders. Sitting amongst

the boulder field was always a pleasing experience for me. The sun struck the rocks and warmed from within. One could look out over the whole valley; Shazradiin Home, the Mountain, the glade, the meadow, the pool, the caverns. How tranquil, how still, this vast expanse that laid before me. The snow was falling ever so lightly, preparing the valley for what it had always prepared it for. I spent the whole day within the rocks, watching snow envelop the land. I let the snow fall flake by flake upon my person until I was fully encased. I let my body's heat meet the water's cold. A shield built around me and I was happy. Perhaps I looked funny, like a pensive snow-mummy. Perhaps I was simply another bump in that ocean of bumps.

While I was in this snowy encasement, Hu'in became the focus of my thought. All those years he kept to himself, dancing here and there with the hearts and minds of Shazradiin. All those years he marveled at all that there was. All those years he was nothing more than a spectre, a spirit whose body lay at Shazradiin. Every time our paths would cross I was overwhelmed by something unknown, ungraspable, ethereal, something *real*. He was dancing with the fates, smiling his smile, laughing his laugh at all that there was. Did he know? Is that how he kept his confidence, his strength even as the world seemed on the verge of cataclysm? Shazradiin teaches that what is before us is not as it seems, so what was Hu'in? Was he simply a questing soul in love with all creation? Or was he fate incarnate, the aggregation of all hopes and fears, wishes and desires, loves and hatreds? Was he perpetuator of the Way or our rebellious savior? What did he have following him around all those years, that protecting spirit, that solemn air? How he always walked with downward stare and pensive eyes. How he always appeared

where he was wanted most and did what was needed. Was the Coming the only force capable of neutralizing Hu'in? Perhaps Hu'in was the force that he was because the Coming was to come. Perhaps Hu'in was just a man who liked to learn...but I don't think it's that way.

The snow had not ceased to fall when I decided to burst forth from my snowy cocoon. The valley was now awash with white, wonderful and still. I made my way across the meadow and sat down on the edge of the pool. The warmth of the water and the lushness of the grass lulled me into a deep slumber.

I saw the little cottage in Nursrak where I was born and raised. I saw the little pups playing with each other, nibbling ears and chasing tails. My mother and father were smiling as they watched my brothers and I play. Then all was washed away and my brother appeared, fighting the Mor'khuns. There was a gash across his face and blood caked his hands. I watched the arrow loosed from across the battlefield pierce my brother's heart. Thunder struck and the burning of my village came to lucid view. Mothers screaming for their children, children grasping out for their mothers. Houses collapsing, burying the sleepers within. The fire too hot and the wind too fierce, Nursrak died away. Coming upon my own corpse lifeless and cold. My eyes stared vacantly back, hypnotizing me, dragging me down, down, down into an enveloping abyss, never to see the light again.

Peacefully, I awoke. I knew this dream was not real. I knew Nursrak to be fine. My brother had not fought the Mor'khuns and died but had returned home a hero. Why had I this dream? The Way is a funny thing sometimes. I knew these dreams would have been the fate of me and my family if Hu'in had not gone out and met the

Coming. How could this be that had Hu'in not acted as he did in the future, my past would have been one of death and destruction as opposed to life and happiness?

The bells tolled, signaling new arrivals. I looked to the Eye and saw the smiling master with the newcomers in toe. How strange it is, the Way. Teachers must teach and students must listen. The masters knew it could be no other way, for that is Shazradiin. I took my looking-glass out to scry those who were viewing Shazradiin Valley for the first time. I had never before bothered to do such a thing. Looking at their faces, it all made sense: Hu'in's sacrifice, Aurelion's message, the teachings of the masters. Though there is always the Way, it is nothing without bliss of newfound wonders.